Karlamagnús Saga. The Saga of Charlemagne and His Heroes. Volume 2:
Part IV. Translated by Constance B. Hieatt. Mediaeval Sources in Translation 17. 1975;
443 pp. Paperbound. ISBN 0–88844–266–1; 978–0–88844–266–6. $54.95

While the most celebrated literature of medieval Scandinavia is the native literature of
Iceland, medievalists are also aware of the important body of Norse literature that is
neither native nor Icelandic: the translations into Old Norse of English and Continental
literature, mainly in Norway. Among these is a large body of translations from the
*chansons de geste* and Carolingian romances of France, including the *Karlamagnús Saga*, a
thirteenth-century version of poems sometimes known as “Geste du Roi” or “Gestes du
Charlemagne et de Roland.”

The contents of this collection range from fairly close versions of surviving French
poems, such as the *Pelerinage* (or *Voyage en Orient*) *de Charlemagne*, to translations of
works of which there is no surviving close analogue; it includes a version of the *Song of
Roland* which is very close to the Oxford manuscript, but probably translated from an
even earlier version – possibly from a source of that manuscript.

The *Saga* is of interest in indicating a medieval translator’s interpretation of terms which
modern scholars find crucial to the understanding of texts; or it preserves or provides
clues to the contents of older versions than the extant originals. As a work of literature, it
bears interesting resemblance to Malory’s compilation of the Arthurian cycle of tales,
although the *Saga* is evidently the work of several hands, and not of one individual.

The present edition is the first translation of the entire work into any modern language.
The translation is published in three volumes, each of which contains an introduction,
notes, and glossary of names. The translation and its extensive apparatus should be of
use to specialists in comparative medieval literature, folklorists, students of Old French,
and those who read sagas.

Part IV, “King Agulandus” (and the longest section of the whole *Saga*), is a conflation
of the early twelfth-century Latin *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotholandi* (known as the
*Psuedo-Turpin Chronicle*), and the later twelfth-century French *Chason d’Aspremont*.
These two works had in common the name of one of Charlemagne’s (mythical) antago-
nists – Aigolandus in Pseudo-Turpin and Agolant in *Aspremont*. In other respects, how-
ever, the two tales are quite different. The Norse version includes the first part of the
*Chroniclle*, dealing with the war against Agolantus (but skipping Agolantus’ death) and
then picks up the story from *Aspremont*, starting at roughly one third of the way through
the poem’s action.